

“YES, SIR: SUBMISSION IN THE WORKPLACE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 2:18-25

Introduction.

Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to Christians scattered around the world as sojourners and exiles. He has this idea that being a Christian changes everything, it changes how we think about and relate to our political environment, how we think about and relate to our work world, and how we do marriage.

He started with how we show respect toward those in political offices, whether high or low. Now Peter moves from the political sphere to the economic sphere, a place where most of us live. How can we live well in the real world, especially among non-Christians?

A word about slavery.

I want to start with a brief word about slavery since it's impossible for us to think about the meaning of passages like this without thinking of our own country's experience. The Bible seems to condone slavery by not explicitly condemning it and this has led some to make sinful applications of what the Bible says.

The slavery spoken of in the Bible is not like the slavery that tarnished our nation's history. The slavery of 17th and 18th century Europe and America was categorically unjust for three reasons summarized well in David Helm's commentary on *I-II Peter* (pgs. 94, 363-364).

First, the slavery of Biblical history was not racial, whereas American slavery was purely racial. No one ever imagined some kind of permanent slavery among whites. There is no Biblical justification for saying blacks were less in the image of God and therefore could be exploited and demeaned. The Bible never condones racism.

Second, the slavery of Biblical history was not necessarily permanent, whereas American slaves were permanent property with no rights and no way to secure their freedom. Hebrew slaves could be freed in the every seven year Jubilee. NT slaves had various means to earn their freedom (I Corinthians 7:21). There is no Biblical justification for permanent exploitation generation after generation.

Third, in ancient times nations enslaved war captives which was more merciful and humane than killing them. Early Americans tried to use this argument to justify enslaving blacks but blacks were not prisoners of war. They were kidnapped and stolen from their own homes and villages for the sole purpose of being property for hard physical labor.

The idea of chattel slavery in our country had no Biblical grounds, it was sin, contrary to sound doctrine and against the glorious Gospel.

People often use a false understanding of the Bible's position on slavery to say since the Bible is outdated and wrong about slavery, so the Bible is outdated and wrong about women as elders or wrong about calling homosexuality sin. If the Bible could be used to support slavery back in the day and that turned out to be a bad thing, so it is wrong to use the Bible to keep us in the dark ages on other issues. The problem here is not the Bible and what it say about slavery, it is the sinful misapplication of it by people in history.

Why doesn't the Bible outright condemn any and all kinds of slavery everywhere? One reason is we apply our view of freedom onto the Bible. In the Bible political or social or personal freedom are not essential to being a Christian and being free in Christ. You can be in prison and be free spiritually. You can not be in prison and be in bondage spiritually.

The Bible doesn't approve or condone or justify or bless slavery, but it regulates abuses and speaks to both masters and servants. It certainly raises the bar compared to the pagan world.

Paul and Peter in their writings clearly elevate slaves by acknowledging them as image-bearers of God and co-heirs in the grace of life. They are spiritually equal with freemen.

The exhortation to submit, vs. 18.

So how are we to understand this text? In the Roman world there were three classes of people, Roman citizens who had all rights and privileges and protections as free people under the law; the freedmen who had some rights and privileges and freedoms; and the servant class or lower working class, the manual laborers, the people who worked in the homes and fields.

Servants in ancient times could be teachers, musicians, shipbuilders, money managers (Matthew 25:14-15), but usually they were poor and often they were household servants or field workers. They could own property, they could be

educated and were often paid, which meant they could buy their freedom. This was the most common employer-employee relationship in those days.

We can broaden the application to include basically everyone who is employed by someone else, who works in order to receive a paycheck. If God commands servants to submit with all respect to their masters, then He can certainly command us to submit with all respect in far less harsh circumstances.

Submit with all respect.

There's that "s" word again. It is a word that simply assumes and acknowledges that God has created this world with authority structures and hierarchies in relationships. Everywhere there are those who are over us and those who are under us. In every realm and sphere of life there are people we must yield and defer to.

This submission is to be voluntary rather than forced, given not taken. Submission is a freedom, it is something we do of our own volition, because of who God is and what He has said. And it's not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. Only a strong person can submit well.

How are we to treat those we work for, those we serve? With respect. Even if we disagree with them, even if we don't think they are worthy. Remember what Peter said last week, they are in authority by the will of God and not based on their character or accomplishments. Their authority doesn't have to be earned, it is given by God.

I can read your minds. What about those who are lousy leaders, who don't deserve it, who don't treat us in the same way, what about those who are unjust, unfair, unkind, who are jerks?

What about when the boss piles on extra work or you have to pick up someone else's load or he cusses you out for no good reason or for a wrong reason, you get passed over, the credit you deserved is given to another, your labors go unappreciated, he plays favorites, he majors in minors, or micromanages or mismanages? Real world stuff.

This command from Peter may have more application in today's culture than ever before. The younger generation entering the work force in the 21st century expect to have jobs that are fulfilling and self-actualizing, where they will grow in developing their gifts and flourish in satisfying relationships of mutual respect and admiration.

I am not saying our jobs have to be miserable or that we have to endure miserable conditions forever, but Scripture acknowledges the realities of life and Scripture acknowledges God as providentially sovereign over life, including our home life and our work life.

Where has God placed us at this time and what has He given into our hands to do? Wherever it is, we are to treat those over us with all respect.

Consider the example of Joseph who was sold as a slave into Potiphar's house. In a bad situation, Joseph served well and did good to his master and the Lord was with Joseph and Potiphar was blessed by God because of Joseph.

If pagan employers were smart they would only hire Christians because a godly Christian shows up on time, is dependable and hardworking, doesn't cheat or embezzle or cut corners, doesn't run down the boss or the company. He gives his best, and does his work as unto the Lord.

I know of a pastor in Boulder, Colorado who has having a house built and one day he went out to see the progress. He noticed a carpenter working on the stair railing was doing an exceptionally fine piece of work, craftsman quality. The pastor commented and thanked the carpenter and the carpenter responded, "Thanks, but I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing it for God."

Some of you enjoy reading the Western novels of Louis L'Amour. One of my favorites is *Conagher*. A loner cowboy who takes up with different ranchers and cattlemen in the winter to get in out of the cold. The other work hands were rustling cattle from the owner and tried to get Conagher to join them. He stood up to them and won the gunfight. His motto was when "I ride, I ride for the brand." Doesn't matter who the boss is or what he's like, when he signs on to work for the man, he is honest, faithful and hardworking. He gave loyalty and he expected it in others. The day he can't do that for the boss, then he moves on.

I have told my sons many times, if you take a paycheck from a man you owe him your best, you owe him integrity and loyalty. If you can't give then you respectfully move on. It's wrong to take a paycheck and run down the boss or company.

Yes, there is one caveat. The command to submit with all respect is not absolute. If we are asked to do anything contrary to your conscience or the will or command of God, then we must respectfully decline and endure the consequences. Remember the respect Daniel and his friends showed in not following an order.

There is a time and a place for God-honoring resistance but many of us go there too quickly and we need to hear Peter's counsel to counter our sinful, rebellious, disrespectful side. Peter is not addressing the exceptional cases. He is addressing normal life as we know it.

The motivation to please God, vss. 19-20.

Peter gives the motivation for acting this way in the phrase "this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." This is a thing pleasing to God and receiving of His blessing and favor.

Peter always links our actions vertically, reminding us that we are citizens of heaven, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God who have countless opportunities to proclaim the excellencies of God to a watching world.

Peter calls us to endure in a manner that doesn't just benefit us or make our lives better, but gives glory to God, draws attention to the difference the Gospel makes in our lives.

The foundation on Christ, vss. 21-25.

Friends, I understand as well as you do that there are few things more trying to our souls than to bear the indignity of some injustice, some unfairness, to have to endure something we did not deserve. A good number of you are right now wrestling with this call to submit with respect.

Our human natures hate being mistreated. We hate being taken advantage of or falsely accused or having unreasonable people get the last word. As if reading our minds Peter consoles us with the example of Jesus.

I Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

What does this kind of submission might look like? Consider Christ. The one who possessed all power and authority and rule, the one who makes the nations His footstool, the one who is called Lord of lords and King of kings, humbled Himself and became a servant.

The King of Glory suffered and endured great abuse without returning threats or accusations or curses. And He was completely innocent, what He endures was completely unjust. And yet Christ resisted even entertaining a thought of revenge. Can we do the same?

What was the key to Christ's actions? How did He do that? How did He endure such torture and abuse from the hands of wicked men? He continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.

How can we endure? By entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly and rights every wrong and exercises vengeance in due time.

Don't look to yourself, don't look to your feelings, your reputation, your honor, what you deserve. Keep looking to God and entrusting yourself to Him. When we have complete confidence that God will ultimately take care of us it sets us free from resentment, self-pity, anger or hopelessness.

It is for us to endure, it is for God to show Himself strong and righteous and just. We don't have to walk softly and carry a big stick, we leave the stick in God's hand, He will wield it far better than we. Submit your flesh and fleshly desires to the Spirit. Surrender your rights to Him.

Continued entrusting yourself to Him who sees and knows and cares and is sovereignly at work and who is pleased when we graciously submit with respect, being mindful of God.

Love your enemies, pray for your enemies, forgive your enemies. Pray as Jesus did, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

When we submit and surrender we are showing that we believe God's way is better, that the happiness and joy and pleasure He can give is better than whatever we can secure for ourselves.

Can any good come out of injustice and unfairness and abuse? Can any good come from enduring because of the sins of others? The greatest good of all did, and the reminder of it is set on this table. So don't doubt for a moment that God will bring great good out of all we experience as we bear it patiently and graciously, being mindful of Him.

Implications and application.

Thirteen year old Andy Lopez was walking down a sidewalk carrying a large airsoft gun made to look like an AK-47 assault rifle. It did not have an orange tip on it.

A Sonoma County California sheriff's deputy ordered Andy to drop the gun. He ordered him a second time to drop the gun. Instead Andy turned and raised the gun

and he was killed. As you can imagine these days there are a lot of questions. I have just one, what would have happened if Andy had been taught well at home to submit to authorities, to obey the police? Or maybe he was and didn't do it. It starts at home, teach it and model it.

The fifth commandment serves all mankind well in this regard.

Deuteronomy 5:16 Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

This is a principle of life, if we honor and respect and obey those who are over us, then it will generally go well for us in life. And if we don't do that we will find life difficult and filled with unnecessary trials and troubles.

Disobedience is displeasing to God. Obedience is pleasing to God, in all its forms. Obedience adorns the doctrine of God, it adorns Scripture, it adorns the Gospel.

That doesn't mean that obedience will always result in our being treated well or having success. Obedience will cause us to experience more of God's grace and favor in our lives. God gives favor to the humble, He lifts up the oppressed and persecuted.

I Peter 2:20 If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Is there a more gracious thing in the sight of God than His Son on the cross dying for sins He never committed? And He did it that we might not have to die for what we did, and that we might die to sin and die to ourselves and die to our reputations and live to righteousness and proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for Jesus and for His example. Enable us by the power of your Spirit and the power of this Word we have received to live in such a way to be like Christ and so please you. May our submission and our respect be root in our love for you and our desire to show that love by our obedience to you. For the sake of Christ and in His name we pray. Amen.

It's Valentine's Day and there is no clearer picture and expression of love toward us than is reflected here at this table. This is the best Valentine's card ever from the most loving God.

Let us pray: Almighty God, with one accord we give you thanks for all the blessings of your grace; but most of all we thank you for the unspeakable gift of your Son Jesus Christ. We most humbly thank you that your Son came to us in human form, that he lived a perfect life on earth, that he died for us on the cross, and that he arose victoriously from the dead. We bless you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the church universal, for the ministry and the sacraments of the church, and for the blessed hope of everlasting life. We pray, gracious Father, that you will grant us your Holy Spirit, that through this sacrament our souls may truly be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us the full assurance of your grace as we draw near to your holy table, filling our hearts with humble gratitude for your mercies. Unite us more fully with our blessed Lord, and so also with one another. Enable us, in newness of life, to pledge ourselves in service to Christ and all your children. And lift our hearts to you, that in all the troubles and sorrows of this life we may persevere in the living hope of the coming of our Savior in glory.

Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Words of Institution.

The Lord Jesus, the same night He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of Me."

After the same manner also, He took the cup when they had supped, saying: "This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

This bread which we break is the communion of the Body of Christ.
The cup which we bless is the communion of His blood.

Prayer of Consecration:

"Ever-present God, as we lift these common elements to the throne of Your grace, we pray You'll bless those coming forth for Your food. May Your real spiritual presence be in the midst of this nourishment. For Christ's sake, Amen."

(The minister, in the Name of Christ, shall extend an invitation to all communicants present to participate in the Sacrament.)

"All those who have been baptized and have made public confession of their faith in Christ, are members of a Christian church, and are truly sorry for and humbly repentant of their sins, are welcome at the Lord's Table. Come, for all things are now ready."

Take, *eat*, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Take, *drink*, remember, and believe that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving

Let us pray: Almighty God, we give to you our humble and hearty thanks, that you in your great mercy have given us your Son to be our Savior from sin and to be our constant source of faith, hope, and love. We bless you for permitting us to show forth his death and to receive the communion of his body and blood through the holy sacrament. We praise you for uniting us more fully with the body of Christ, and for assuring us that we are heirs of your heavenly kingdom. Grant, we ask you, that our commemoration of his death may help to daily increase our faith, to establish our hope, and to strengthen our love. Enable us henceforth to live always for him who gave himself for us, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction:

I Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.